



U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Chairman

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News Advisory

For immediate release
June 23, 2005

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GAO Reports Serious Weaknesses with Voter Registration Processes in States Despite HAVA Requirements

Electoral System Remains Vulnerable to Vote Fraud

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) today released a report finding serious weaknesses with voter registration processes in states despite requirements in the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA) that states have a statewide voter registration list and implement list verification procedures.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R-Wis.), who requested this GAO report along with Judiciary Immigration, Border Security, and Claim Subcommittee Chairman John N. Hostettler (R-Ind.), said, “Vote fraud has the same corrosive effect on democracy as illegal vote disenfranchisement. The integrity of our election system will continue to be susceptible to vote fraud until States become more conscientious with regard to confirming the accuracy of voter registration lists, especially concerning whether people who are dead or are locked up in prison are still voting.”

“In addition, GAO’s determination that states have put in place few safeguards to verify citizenship is dismaying given the millions of people here illegally. It’s past time States get busy cleaning up their voter records – especially in my home state of Wisconsin,” added Chairman Sensenbrenner.

“The integrity of our election process is vital to preserving the integrity of our constitutional government,” said Rep. John Hostettler, chairman of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims. “This study indicates that this integrity may be in question as a result of those who are not legally permitted to vote violating the sacred

trust of the citizens of this country in our electoral system.”

GAO Report Highlights

- Citizenship status is based primarily on self-certification under penalty of perjury for providing false information, and the available data for verifying citizenship was problematic. For example, some standard forms of ID, such as state drivers licenses, state IDs, or Social Security cards, are not evidence of citizenship because they are also issued to noncitizens.
- Criminal information can be incomplete, not timely, or difficult to decipher; omitted birth dates, for example, can mean multiple matches against voter registration lists.
- State death records may not include residents who died outside the state, such as retirees who spend part of the year outside the state.
- HAVA's requirement that voter registrants be matched with Social Security records, including the name, date, of birth, and last 4 digits of the Social Security Number, may produce multiple or inaccurate matches. The one state that used this SSA system in 2004 found about 2,500 names were non-matches.
- GAO also found that U.S. Attorney data on felony convictions in federal courts and U.S. District Courts data on those who request exemption from jury duty for non citizenship could be helpful to local election officials, but were not consistently being provided to them. The number of potentially ineligible voter registrants identified by these two sources may be small but could be important in determining the outcome of a close election.

GAO Report Background

- GAO reviewed how 7 states verified voter eligibility and the accuracy of their voter registration lists. Six of the 7 states had obtained waivers until January 1, 2006, for implementing HAVA's requirements.
- GAO examined the states' methods for verifying age, citizenship, criminal status, mental competence, residency, and identifying deceased registrants or duplicate registrations, and found the methods varied among the 7 states.
- Officials in California and New York, the two most populous states, said meeting the January 1, 2006 deadline would be difficult, leaving the door open for missing the deadline.
- Although implementing HAVA's requirements should help improve the accuracy of state voter registration lists, the quality and availability of data for verifying voter eligibility remain problematic.

The GAO report is available at www.gao.gov.

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